

## **My son or daughter says they are transgender.**

### **What does that mean?**

Transgender is a broad term that generally refers to someone whose gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. Most people never question whether their gender identity matches their body, but for those that do, it can be very confusing and difficult or it can be very liberating and empowering.

There are lots of different ways to be transgender and none is either right or wrong; it depends very much on the individual and how they feel most comfortable and happy in the world. Some things your child may wish to do whilst exploring their gender identity include using a different name or different pronouns (she/he/ze/hir), varying gender presentation (i.e. dressing in a more feminine or masculine way, changing grooming and hairstyles), pursuing medical intervention including counseling, hormone therapy and/or various surgical interventions.

You may find some of the ways your child wants to explore their gender identity challenging or confronting, but it is useful to examine your own existing ideas about transgendered people. There are lots of common myths or misconceptions about transgender people in our society and finding more information and support for yourself can help you deal with your child and the challenges you will face, both individually and together, in a more constructive and supportive way.

Your son or daughter will always be your child and they need your love and support now more than ever. Even though you may not understand what is happening or why, your efforts to support your child will make a huge difference to their health and wellbeing in the long term.

## **How am I supposed to feel about all of this?**

There is no right or wrong way to feel about your child telling you that they are transgender. Some parents feel...

- Like they did 'something wrong' in raising their child and that things like this only happen in 'dysfunctional families' not in our family
- Initially horror and disbelief, followed by devastation and grief over losing the child they thought they had
- Worried, sad, confused, angry, scared, ashamed, guilty, embarrassed, isolated, helpless
- That they need to 'straighten out' their child and get them to 'stop this nonsense'
- That they want to be supportive but don't know what to do or where to get help
- That their child will be marginalised, discriminated against and never be happy
- Shut out and like they don't know their child any more
- Relieved that they know why their child has been so unhappy, even wishing that their child had told them earlier so they could do something to help
- Like they want to protect, advocate for and support their child and their choices
- Glad that they are the kind of parent their child can share something like this with and grateful to be included in their child's journey

However you feel about your child telling you they are transgender is valid. Do try to remember that your feelings may change over time. If you can avoid extreme reactions and seek support that allows you to express your feelings freely and work through any difficulties separately to those of your child, you are more likely to be able to preserve a positive relationship with your loved one.

## **Useful Tips**

? There is variation in how much medical intervention transgender people want. Some people prefer to just live as the opposite gender or somewhere in between, others want to take hormones and have extensive surgery. Talk to your child about how they feel about medical intervention and try to be an ally when dealing with the medical system which can be daunting and difficult.

? The combination of hormone treatment and all of the social and mental challenges of changing gender (known as transition) can lead to some erratic or selfish behavior, similar to an adolescent going through puberty. However, not every negative behavior is due to transition or hormone therapy; if you are worried about your child's behaviour, talk to them about it or seek support through PFLAG or the other organisations listed in this brochure.

? Your child may want you to help them with the practical aspects of transition or they may not. This could involve helping with clothes or grooming, but it is important to ask rather than assume they should look or act a certain way if they identify as a particular gender.

? Changing names and pronouns will probably be quite important for your transgender child. Also treating them as the gender they are presenting as, even if you have difficulty seeing them as such, will be very important. This may be an area of discomfort or difficulty for you, so you may need to discuss this with your chosen support.

? Parents can play a pivotal role in providing a safe and supportive space for their transgender children to be themselves and reduce the detrimental effects of any societal discrimination or stigma. They can also be powerful allies and advocates.

## Resources and Support

### Healthy Communities

Extensive services for LGBTI Queenslanders including health promotion, support groups and education.

<http://www.gahc.org.au/transgender>

### The Gender Centre

Provides counseling, housing, advocacy, outreach, training and more in Sydney and some services or referrals by telephone.

<http://www.gendercentre.org.au>

### ATSAQ

The Australian Transgender Support Association of QLD (ATSAQ) was formed to help, advise and assist the transgender community in Queensland.

<http://www.atsaq.com/>

### Open Doors Youth Service

Provides support to young people who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT).

<http://www.opendoors.net.au/>

### Gender Identity Research and Education Society

UK based organization with excellent information for families, educators, employers and more.

<http://www.gires.org.uk/index.php>

### TransFamily

US based group that provides support, education, advocacy, and outreach for the transgendered community, families, friends, partners, and allies of all ages. Excellent email discussion lists.

<http://www.transfamily.org>

### LGBTI Legal Service

The service seeks to assist Queensland LGBTI communities to gain access to justice through the provision of legal and social welfare services.

<http://www.lgbtilegalservice.org/>

## Terminology

**Sex** describes our physical structure, including external appearance, internal organs and brain, which all differ between males and females.

**Gender Identity** describes the inner sense of knowing that we are boys or girls, and later men or women.

**Gender Role** describes how we behave in society. Even though we now live in a more equal society, boys and girls are still expected to dress differently from each other and, possibly, enjoy different kinds of activities.

**Transgender** is a general term used to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Gender nonconforming** refers to people who do not follow other people's ideas or stereotypes about how they should look or act based on the female or male sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transgender** and **Gender nonconforming** are umbrella terms that often encompass other terms such as transsexual, MtF (male to female), FtM (female to male), transman, transwoman, transvestite or cross dresser, gender queer, bigendered, sister girl, brother boy, intersex person, Two Spirit, and many more. It is important to refer to people with the term they prefer, if you are not sure what they prefer simply ask.

**Gender Questioning** People who are questioning their gender identity might be wondering whether they identify as a boy, a girl or another gender. They might also be experimenting with different genders.



## Information for Parents with Transgender Sons and Daughters



<http://www.pflagbrisbane.org.au/>